

NATO charter. It is an agreement of an alliance where every nation under that flag will stand to defend the other under attack.

Most of us don't remember, but after 9/11/2001, the NATO allies came together and said that the United States had been attacked under article 5 and that they were willing to defend us if the terrorism continued. That is the kind of solidarity which we needed then and which the world needs now.

The NATO alliance was, unfortunately, weakened under the last President, but they have come around now to become a powerful force.

Just last week on Thursday, 10 of the Ambassadors from European nations gathered in a room and talked to us about their solidarity behind our effort to support Ukraine. It was a positive meeting, a good feeling, and I am glad that the NATO forces understand their responsibility and are prepared to defend these countries that are involved.

There is one last point I want to make because it is so outrageous, I believe it should be reported. The question really comes down to an interview of Donald Trump, the former President of the United States, by Jeanine Pirro on FOX television. He called Putin's invasion of Ukraine a project to rebuild a Soviet empire that had been, in the words of Donald Trump, "full of love." Full of love, a Soviet empire?

Unfortunately, the former President has no knowledge of history, nor does he have any understanding as to what happened to the countries under the subjugation of a Soviet empire, how they were forcefully brought into that alliance, which they never wanted to be part of. He obviously doesn't recall that 4 million Ukrainians died in the famines of the 1930s under Joseph Stalin's Soviet rule.

At one point, Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an evil empire. For Donald Trump, it is "full of love." How can he be so far wrong and not see the obvious—that Putin is not the spiritual man he was once identified as? He is a ruthless war criminal, and innocent people are paying the price for his outrages.

#### E-CIGARETTES

Mr. President, there is something else that is going on on the domestic front. Each of us kind of defines our career in Congress as what is important to us, and when I came to the House of Representatives, I had a little planning behind the decision to take after the tobacco companies.

My family was touched by tobacco death, as so many families are. I lost my father when I was a sophomore in high school. I was 14 years old; he was 53. He died from lung cancer. Two packs of Camels a day did it to him.

I decided in the House of Representatives I would start to take what action I could to stop the tobacco companies in their deadly march across America. So one of the things I did was to ban smoking on airplanes, put the law into effect, and it has changed dramatically not just air travel but life in America.

I had no idea that that was a tipping point, and once we banned smoking on airplanes, people would say: Well, why didn't you include schools or office buildings or hospitals or veterans facilities or buses or trains? And the dominoes kept falling. Now it is peculiar, it is strange, should someone walk into a room and light up a cigarette. It just doesn't happen. So that much was done.

But the tobacco companies didn't stop, even after they were proven to be liars under oath before the U.S. House of Representatives when they were asked whether or not tobacco caused cancer.

My new cause, again, against tobacco companies relates to e-cigarettes and vaping.

It has been 6 months—6 months. That is how long past a court-ordered deadline the Food and Drug Administration is to finish its public health review of e-cigarettes—6 months. As an attorney, if my client were 6 months late in meeting a court order, there would be major consequences, but for the FDA, it appears to be business as usual.

Mind you, this is not some bureaucratic squabble. The issue at stake is whether or not the Food and Drug Administration will do its job to prevent children in America from getting hooked on e-cigarettes that are being peddled by big tobacco companies in violation of the law.

You see, the Tobacco Control Act, the law of the land, requires that tobacco products be reviewed by the FDA before they can even be sold. The law says tobacco companies must prove to the FDA that their product is "appropriate for the protection of public health." They can't meet that standard. Everyone knows it. If they don't meet it, they are not supposed to be sold in the United States, period. That is the law.

But instead of doing its job, the FDA turned a blind eye for years at e-cigarettes and vaping—many funded by the largest cigarette corporations like R.J. Reynolds and Altria. Those companies flooded the market with flavored e-cigarettes meant to hook our kids. The result: Millions of children became addicted to e-cigarettes. Big Tobacco intentionally targeted children with trendy advertisements and fruit- or candy-flavored nicotine products.

These actions and FDA's failure to regulate e-cigarettes were a flagrant violation of existing law, so in 2019, a Federal judge stepped in and called the Agency out for its abdication of responsibility. The judge found that the Food and Drug Administration "decided not to enforce the pre-market review provisions at all." So the Federal court gave the FDA a deadline. Listen carefully. It required the FDA to complete its review of the legality of all e-cigarettes being sold in the United States by September 9, 2021.

When that deadline arrived 6 months ago, FDA announced that it had denied millions of applications for e-cigarettes

that had no business on the market. That was important and long overdue. However, a new trend emerged. Vaping companies, including many whose products had been denied by the FDA, were attempting to circumvent the law by reinventing their products.

Many e-cigarette companies tried to use so-called synthetic nicotine. We know nicotine—it is the habit-forming drug that is included in tobacco cigarettes. So they decided that if they made nicotine not out of tobacco but out of other chemicals, they would escape the reach of law.

The day after the FDA ordered Texas-based VaporSalon to remove its products from the market, the company announced:

VaporSalon is switching to tobacco-free nicotine . . . the main purpose of this is to be outside of FDA's regulations.

They were very bold about it. They wanted to hook our kids with synthetic nicotine and were arguing the government couldn't stop them.

The e-cigarette most popular with children is known as Puff Bar. It uses synthetic nicotine to escape the reach of the FDA. They peddle these addictive cigarettes to our kids in flavors not designed for any adults. Listen to the flavors: Blue Raz, Lemon Ice, Watermelon.

FDA is asleep at the wheel. But Congress recognized this problem recently and did something about it. The fiscal year 2022 omnibus bill that passed last week contains a bipartisan provision that I worked on with Senators COLLINS and MURRAY. Our policy closes the synthetic nicotine loophole.

When President Biden signs that law today, we are going to see this law go into effect and clarify the FDA as the authority to regulate synthetic nicotine products and to keep those e-cigarettes off the market. Congress is saying clearly that we will not allow predatory vaping companies to target kids for profit. Now, it is the FDA's duty to do the same.

I recently voted for the new Director, Dr. Califf, and I said to him: I am going to watch you, and I am going to be on you like a hawk. You have a Federal legal responsibility to stop these e-cigarettes from being sold to our kids. Don't waste time.

I hope he doesn't. I hope the FDA will use their new authority.

JUUL and Puff Bar are two companies most responsible for fueling the youth vaping epidemic. They continue to be sold despite court-ordered deadlines and despite the fact they use these kid-friendly flavors and tactics.

So why has the FDA not removed them? Why are more teens and even preteens still getting hooked on e-cigarettes? FDA has the authority to clear all unauthorized e-cigarettes from the market and force their sellers to prove that their products—it is their legal responsibility to prove their products are appropriate for the protection of public health.

Good luck. They are not going to be able to do that, and we know it.

Last week, I led a bipartisan letter with Senator ROMNEY, Republican of Utah, and 13 other Senators saying to the FDA to do three things: finish the review of e-cigarettes immediately; reject the applications for e-cigarettes, especially kid-friendly flavors; and No. 3, clear the market of all unapproved e-cigarettes.

Last month, when the Senate approved Dr. Califf, I made it clear that I wanted to treat this matter as an urgent requirement and to clear the backlog. Congress has now given him every tool he needs. Today marks 1 month of his tenure as Commissioner. Will he keep his word to me and so many others to protect kids from a lifetime of addiction? It is time for FDA to do its job and protect America's kids from Big Tobacco and their candy-flavored, sickness-causing e-cigarettes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The Republican whip.

#### AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, Friday marked the first anniversary of the so-called American Rescue Plan, which is the Democrats' partisan \$1.9 trillion spending spree. Fittingly, the anniversary arrived just 1 day after the release of February's inflation numbers which marked the worst inflation since January of 1982.

Why do I say "fittingly"?

Well, because the anniversary of the American Rescue Plan is basically the anniversary of our inflation crisis. While it is true that supply chain issues and the reopening of economies after COVID shutdowns created certain inflationary pressures, a big part of the reason for our current inflation crisis is Democrats' decision to pass the American Rescue Plan last March.

The definition of inflation is too many dollars chasing too few goods and services, and that is exactly the situation Democrats helped create with their so-called American Rescue Plan. Democrats came into office mere weeks after Congress had passed a fifth—fifth—bipartisan COVID relief bill totaling almost \$1 trillion and meeting, essentially, all current pressing COVID needs. Our economy was well on its way to a healthy recovery, and the majority of States had the money they needed to deal with the pandemic. In short, it was abundantly clear that we were not in immediate need of trillions more in government spending.

But that didn't stop Democrats. Now that they were in charge, they were eager to take advantage of the COVID crisis to begin implementing their Big Government vision. So in the name of COVID relief, they pushed through a massive partisan \$1.9 trillion spending piece of legislation filled with unnecessary spending and handouts to Democratic interest groups. Less than 9 percent of that \$1.9 trillion spending bill was earmarked for actually combating COVID. The rest went to priorities like a \$350 billion slush fund for States, a bailout for union pensions, rental as-

sistance far in excess of anything that was needed, and the list goes on.

Despite being billed as essential COVID relief, a substantial portion of the money appropriated will not be spent until 2022 or later; and despite the pressing need for workers to fill the millions of available job openings, Democrats created incentives for Americans to stay on unemployment instead of returning to work by extending enhanced unemployment benefits until September of 2021, long after they were likely to be needed. So the end result of all this was entirely predictable.

Democrats flooded the economy with unnecessary government money, and the economy overheated as a result. And you don't have to take my word for it. Here is what Steve Rattner, who served in the Obama administration, had to say in November:

The original sin was the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, passed in March. The bill—almost completely unfunded—sought to counter the effects of the COVID pandemic by focusing on demand-side stimulus rather than on investment. That has contributed materially to today's inflation levels.

Let me repeat that. This, according to Steve Rattner, who worked in the Obama administration, about inflation—talked about the legislation passed last year by the Democrats. He said that this "has contributed materially to today's inflation levels."

Or, as another former Obama administration member put it:

The United States has had much more inflation than almost any other advanced economy in the world.

That was Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University and former Obama administration economic adviser.

He went on to say:

The difference comes because the United States stimulus is in a category of its own.

That, again, from another former Obama administration economist, Jason Furman.

Inflation started to rise almost as soon as the ink was dry on the American Rescue Plan, and it just keeps rising. February's 7.9 percent inflation marks the worst inflation since January of 1982—January of 1982—40 years ago.

And Americans are struggling. Just going to the grocery store is taking up a larger and larger portion of the American paycheck. Ground beef is up 13 percent; eggs are up 11 percent; citrus fruits are up 16 percent; chicken is up 13 percent; milk, up 11 percent; bacon and related products are up 18 percent; and on and on and on.

In fact, one American quoted in the New York Times noted that bacon is now as expensive as filet mignon used to be. Ordinary goods are starting to feel like luxury objects as more and more families struggle to afford basic grocery items.

A Washington Post columnist noted that a number of the price increases recorded for February were the highest annual increases ever recorded for

those items, including an 8.4-percent increase in the price of baby food and an 11-percent increase in the cost of lunch meat.

In a speech to House Democrats last week, the President suggested that he was "sick of" people saying that Democrats' reckless spending had helped cause our inflation crisis. This is what the President said last week—President Biden:

[T]he American people think the reason for inflation is the government is spending more money. Simply not true.

Well, there are a lot of economists who would disagree with him, including the two Democratic economists I have already quoted. And President Biden himself actually admitted in November that his stimulus checks helped increase the demand fueling inflation. I am sorry that President Biden is sick of having people point this out.

But you know who else is sick and tired of things? The American people. They are sick and tired of facing massive price increases everywhere they look. They are sick of increasingly having to live paycheck to paycheck as they wonder just how much further their grocery prices are going to go up. They are sick of wondering if they will be able to pay all of next month's bills.

And whether President Biden likes it or not, his so-called American Rescue Plan is responsible for a substantial part of the economic distress that Americans are now experiencing. And while President Biden may be sick of it, we need to keep talking about this because the President is still—still—trying to double down on the spending strategy that helped create this inflation crisis in the first place. Just 2 weeks ago in the State of the Union Address, the President discussed inflation and outlined his hopes for massive new amounts of government spending, spending that would unquestionably take an already bad inflation situation and make it even worse.

It is nice that the President and congressional Democrats are now talking about our inflation crisis, but it would be even nicer if they would realize that it was their spending that helped trigger this crisis in the first place; otherwise, we will continue to see Democrats push for ever bigger increases in government spending with correspondingly devastating price increases for American families.

The American Rescue Plan was a bad deal for Americans. Let's hope that Democrats do not have the chance to double down on this legislation and make our current inflation crisis even worse.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.